

# String Instrument Sizing Guide

Learning to play a string instrument is a rewarding venture and comes with the benefit of different sized instruments, making the string family a great choice for younger students. However, if you're not aware of how to find the right sized instrument for a student, it can be a daunting process...

*Fear not - here's a handy guide!*

## Violins

The violin is a popular first instrument for young learners everywhere, with sizes as small as 1/32nd, designed for tiny toddlers! Violin students can expect to upsize every other year, with 8 year olds often playing on 1/2 sized instruments, 10 year olds on 3/4 sized instruments and 12-13 year olds on 4/4 (full) sized violins.

The age-sizing system, however, does not allow for sudden growth spurts and cannot be applied to particularly tall or short students, so it's always best to consult your tutor (or a strings expert, if you do not have a tutor yet) to be sure.

As a rough guide to check if a violin is the correct size for a student, ask the learner to hold the violin in playing position and cup the palm around the very tip of the scroll. If the student has a natural 95 degree bend at the elbow, the violin is likely to be the perfect size.

## Violas

Unlike violins, violas are sized by the length of the instrument's body. This can add a pinch of confusion to violinists wanting to transition, but generally, a viola student's instrument would be around one violin size bigger than their respective violin size - for example, a 9 year old with a 23" arm would require a 14" viola, which is around the same size as a full sized violin. This means that caution to avoid strain must be exercised in both lessons and practise!

Violinists usually end up on a full sized instrument by the age of 12 or 13, but viola sizes continue to increase into adulthood, with particularly tall adults growing swiftly to fit 16.5" instruments!

## Cellos

Like violins, cellos come in fractional sizes, but a student's finger span (rather than arm length) is the main consideration in sizing. A cellist who can comfortably extend 6" or more between

the tips of the index and pinky fingers is generally ready for a full sized instrument, although some adults still play on a 7/8 instrument.

It's easy to figure out sizes down from a full size by subtracting an inch of outer finger span per fraction. For example, a 5" span generally means a 3/4 sized instrument, and a 4" span a 1/2 sized cello.

Although arm length is not the main decider, it's important to take it into account for students with particularly long fingers or short arms. A student with shorter arms may struggle to bow comfortably on a larger instrument.

## Basses

Double basses listed in fractional sizes too, but the fraction refers to string length rather than instrument size. Even most full grown adults never grow into a full size instrument, so students should never be advised to use them - most professionals play 3/4 sized instruments.

As a general guide, 6 - 10 year olds generally suit 1/4 size instruments, moving to 1/2 size at age 11 - 13 and graduating onto 3/4 size at age 14-15+. However, with sizing bassists, finger span, arm length, and body size should all be considered together.

To assess finger span, ask the student to make their hand into a comfortable playing position (be sure they are not over-stretching!). More than a 5" span between the tips of the index and pinky fingers will be needed to comfortably play the lowest notes on the E string of a 3/4 sized bass - the widest span needed on the instrument. The right arm should be long enough to touch the bridge while in playing position, and the left arm should be able to span the entire range of the fingerboard without discomfort.

Each student grows differently, so even if you are confident that you have self-sized your instrument correctly, it is always best to seek the help of a professional to be sure!